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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS PARLIAMENT'S BORDER CAUCUS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED--PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

1. (U) Summary: Ambassador Wilkins and Minister Counselor of Consular Affairs Keith Powell met for 75 minutes with Parliament's Border Caucus on October 26, fielding questions on subjects ranging from the new travel document requirements of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) to the softwood lumber dispute. The Ambassador urged Border Caucus members and their constituents to register their views on the WHTI during the present comment period. He also advised that Canada and the United States should not let disagreement on individual issues (e.g., softwood lumber) sour the broader collaborative and cooperative relationship. Though a few prickly issues were raised, the tone of the meeting was positive and cordial. End summary.

2. (U) The Border Caucus, a multiparty group of 37 Members of Parliament whose ridings are adjacent to or affected by the border, invited the Ambassador to join its October 26 meeting. The Border Caucus was formed one year ago, largely as the result of efforts by Russ Hiebert, Conservative MP from British Columbia. Hiebert and three other MPs are co-chairs: Claude Banchand (Bloc, Quebec), Roger Gallaway (Liberal, Ontario), and Brian Masse (NDP, Ontario).

3. (U) After his introduction by Hiebert, the Ambassador addressed about 22 members of the Border Caucus for 10 minutes, relating his experiences and impressions after four months on the job in Ottawa. He expressed appreciation for the warm welcome he has received throughout Canada (he has visited the three Canadian territories and all but one province). The Ambassador noted that when the U.S. has been in need, such as the 9/11 attacks and Hurricane Katrina, Canada has been the first to offer help. When President Bush visited Canada in November 2004, he thanked Canada for its assistance following 9/11. During Secretary Rice's visit this week, she also offered the thanks of America for Canada's quick and generous efforts to aid the victims of Katrina. The Ambassador offered to take questions about any issues of concern to the MPs. He urged them to remember, however, that while there are small irritants in our relationship, the broader Canada-U.S. partnership is strong, mutually supportive, and pervasive.

WHTI

4. (U) As anticipated, the most urgent concern of the Border Caucus members is the WHTI and its requirement that by January 2008, everyone entering the United States, including those entering by the land border with Canada, must hold a passport or similarly secure travel document. Caucus members worry that business, tourism, and casual travel could all suffer because of the WHTI. The first question came from Conservative MP Rob Nicholson of Niagara Falls, who has four border crossings in his riding. Nicholson asked if, because of the unique Canada-U.S. relationship, Canadians might be exempted from the new travel document requirement. The Ambassador replied that the new documentary requirement was still "a work in progress" and said that Nicholson and the others should make their views known during the comment period that runs until October 31. He added that it is unlikely there would be an exemption for Canadians to whatever documentary requirements are decided upon since all travelers, including American citizens, will be expected to adhere to the new regulations.

5. (SBU) Replying to a question from Bloc MP Claude Banchand, the Ambassador, joined by Consular head Powell, suggested that the most productive way to respond to the WHTI requirements would be to find ways to make them workable. Banchand reported that Parliament had recently passed a (nonbinding) motion against a passport requirement for crossing the Canada-U.S. border. The Ambassador and Powell emphasized that no final rule has been issued yet and suggested that MPs submit comments and work with their counterparts in the U.S. Congress and Senate to address the common concerns of border legislators regarding the WHTI.

They explained that there is discussion of an alternative to a passport--a lower cost, laminated card like a credit card--that would trigger transmission of data to a border inspector's monitor as a traveler approached the port of entry. The Ambassador and Powell pointed out that rather than impeding cross-border movement, the use of technology, coupled with standardized documents, may make crossing the land border much faster and easier than it is today.

Softwood lumber

16. (SBU) Prefacing his remarks by saying that "we detest those who play the anti-American card," Stockwell Day, Conservative from British Columbia, raised the softwood lumber dispute. He asked for specifics of the various rulings. The Ambassador explained that while the recent NAFTA panel had ruled against the United States, the WTO had ruled in favor. The Ambassador noted that there would likely be another ruling on October 28. The Ambassador said, "If I could fix this problem, I would." He urged Border Caucus members to keep softwood in perspective: it is a trade dispute, and only one small aspect of our much larger trading relationship. He cautioned that too much Canadian rhetoric about softwood lumber could create a negative reaction in Washington.

Potpourri

17. (U) Larry Bagnell, Liberal from the Yukon Territory, noted that Alaska and the Yukon Territory frequently collaborate in the tourism sector, and they submitted a joint comment on the WHTI voicing their common concerns. Bagnell said he also had questions about the several opposing rulings regarding the softwood lumber dispute. The Ambassador offered to send the Border Caucus members a brief outline of the facts behind the various softwood lumber decisions. Bagnell raised the differing views of the U.S. and Canada regarding exploring for petroleum in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) and demarcating the border along the Northwest Passage. The Ambassador acknowledged that, yes, we do have different views on both of those.

18. (SBU) Gurmant Grewal, Conservative from British Columbia, complained of what he described as "racial profiling" at border crossings and the presence of militiamen. The Ambassador explained that the U.S. does not practice racial profiling. He noted that the militiamen on the border have no official capacity. Grewal added that he himself was recently held up three times on return flights to Vancouver from Mexico. On hearing details of Grewal's travel, Consular chief Powell explained that things like cash purchases of one-way tickets and not having luggage on an international flight may make one appear suspicious. Grewal said that if his name is on a "No-Fly" list, he wishes to be removed from it. Powell offered to look into the particulars of Grewal's personal complaint.

19. (U) The NDP's Brian Masse from Windsor asked if the USG and Government of Canada were preparing to put up public funds to match the proposal expected October 28 from Manny Maroun (owner of the Ambassador Bridge between Detroit and Windsor) to privatize the Windsor-Detroit tunnel. The Ambassador responded that we view the recommendations of the binational commission as those that can most adequately address the Windsor-Detroit crossing for the long-term. He offered to keep in contact with Masse regarding the Maroun proposal and the issue of funding.

110. (U) Jeff Watson, Conservative from Ontario, sent a staffer to ask if the United States and Canada were finally going to be able to join together and make common cause against European subsidies in the World Trade Organization. The Ambassador offered to look into that question and get back to Watson.

111. (U) Greg Thompson, Conservative from New Brunswick, thanked the Ambassador for joining MPs to barbecue hamburgers at Parliament Hill. (Note: Parliament held a fund-raiser luncheon for Katrina victims on September 28 at which MPs and the Ambassador joined Prime Minister Martin in cooking meals that raised \$125,000. End note.) Thompson raised his concern that the United States was beginning to view the Canadian border with the same optic as the Mexican border. He noted that the U.S. and Canada have unique agreements in security and law enforcement. Our two countries must move ahead with new bilateral activities without waiting for Mexico to join them. The Ambassador assured Thompson that we appreciate the unique character of the Canada-U.S. border. Comment: Thompson did not elaborate further, but perhaps he was alluding to the trilateral linkage proposed in the Security and Prosperity Partnership. Embassy will follow up with Thompson. End comment.

¶12. (SBU) Mark Warawa, Conservative from British Columbia, told the Ambassador that a recently discovered underground tunnel used by drug smugglers is located in his riding. He said he was pleased the drug smugglers using the tunnel were arrested on the U.S. side, adding that they would have gotten off too easily had they been arrested on the Canadian side. Warawa reported that the RCMP is being overwhelmed by the number of growing operations in B.C., as many as 800 of them, and cannot adequately respond to them. He opined that C-17, the proposed legislation to decriminalize marijuana while at the same time increasing the maximum fine for grow ops, has been "shelved" and will remain so as long as Canada is "in election mode."

¶13. (U) Denis Paradis, Liberal from Quebec, asked if the Ambassador would intervene in the planned expansion of a garbage landfill on the U.S. side of Lake Memphremagog, a popular resort that straddles the Quebec-Vermont border. Paradis maintains that the landfill as planned will pollute the lake. The Ambassador offered to look into it. The last Border Caucus member to speak was Lynne Yelich, Conservative from Saskatchewan, whose main purpose in attending the meeting was to invite the Ambassador to visit her province. As it turns out, the Ambassador will be in Saskatchewan on November 30 on a trip that will complete his initial tours of Canada's provinces.

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WILKINS